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01 | Artist Life Insider

"Special Feature: Balancing Art and Livelihood"

"Art is liberating, rebellious, and uncompromising."

Yet when art intersects with markets, promotion, and commercialization, artists often need a trusted partner—someone who can help them step out of their own world and connect with the outside.

Today, we have the privilege of interviewing Mr. Thomas, Rafayel's gallery manager.

While Rafayel's paintings overflow with personality and romance, Thomas's work lies in finding balance within this freedom, paving the perfect path between artistic creation and the art market.

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Join us for Issue 14 of "Artist Life Insider" as we delve into "The Gallery Manager: Thomas's Story."

Opening: Mr. Thomas, hello! Thank you for taking the time for this interview. Could you start with a self-introduction to help our readers understand your background and work?

Hello everyone, I'm Thomas. No need for formalities—just Thomas is fine, like how Rafayel calls me.

I've been in art management for several years now. I started as an agent, and later partnered with Rafayel to open a gallery, focusing on curation and contemporary art promotion.

Rafayel and I aren't just business partners—I'd

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say we've been friends for many years now.

Q1: As both an artist's manager and gallery director, what do you find most challenging in your daily work?

Finding Rafayel, without a doubt!
Did you expect me to talk about business negotiations or exhibition curation? Well, sure, the business side comes with all sorts of challenges, but those are just basic work to me.
But we haven't seen Rafayel at all today, have we? Haha!

Q2: The artists we've interviewed before all had their unique creative habits. Some keep their favorite plush bear nearby, while others

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must drink exactly three bubble teas before starting work. From your observation, does Rafayel have any such peculiar habits?

Wait, they all have such odd habits?

Thomas blinks in surprise before falling into deep thought for nearly a minute.

When creating art, Rafayel likes to put his glass fish tank over his head to truly experience life from a fish's perspective, to see the world through their eyes...

Okay, he doesn't actually do that. I was just thinking how these quirky personas can be effective marketing for artists, but I couldn't come up with a good one on the spot.

What? Did you all actually believe that? I suppose artists can get away with anything these days...

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But if I had to point out something genuinely concerning, it would be how Rafayel completely forgets to eat when he's working. I used to bring food to his studio just to make sure he hadn't passed out from hunger. Though lately, I don't have to worry about that anymore.

When we tried to inquire about this recent change, Thomas insisted it was a private matter of Rafayel's and politely declined to elaborate further.

>>>So is Rafayel the type to forget to eat when he's working?

I don't think he sees painting as work at all.

>>>How can you tell if Rafayel is getting inspiration or just spacing out?

Ah, well, I never ask him directly—he'll always

say he's getting inspiration.

Q3: Rafayel is an artist who pursues individuality and romance. Do you think commercialization restricts him?

Sometimes I wish it would... Just a little.

Thomas sighs wistfully at the thought.

The thing is, Rafayel couldn't care less about how much his paintings sell for, or his commercial value as an artist.

We're only bound by the things we care about, aren't we?

Q4: Have you ever considered what would happen if Rafayel lost his creative spark?

"That's impossible."

This was Thomas's most resolute answer of

the entire interview.

Q5: This interview will be released during art school admission season. Do you have any words for those who are about to enter this field?

First, to all young aspiring artists, congratulations on choosing a path full of challenges and endless possibilities.
Second, there will certainly be moments of uncertainty along the way, but as long as you stay true to your artistic voice, you'll eventually find your own path.
Who knows? Perhaps one of you will become as remarkable as Rafayel—I'll definitely be there to sign you when you do!
Finally, try to dance with the industry. Art

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isn't just about creation—it's intimately connected with markets, audiences, and society. Understanding how the industry works and finding your place within it is an art in itself... Your work will ultimately dialogue with the world through various channels. Here's to all the young artists—may you find joy in the world of art.

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The scent of fresh vegetables still clinging to soil mingles with the sharp smell of raw meat, while the sound of haggling fills the air.

In the market, Thomas's designer blue-gray coat stands out. A nearby elderly man, in nothing but slippers and shorts for his grocery run, eyes Thomas's jingling metal necklace with visible disapproval.

The produce vendor stares for a good three seconds before recognition dawns. "Thomas? Solana was here this morning. Didn't you two coordinate?"

"Getting all dressed up for your birthday, huh? The outfit, the hair... even makeup?"

Thomas carefully selects a few stalks of fresh green onions. "Just getting something to make garlic shrimp for her. The styling is for a

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magazine interview today... Wait, how did you know it's my birthday?"

"Solana mentioned it this morning..." The vendor weighs the green onions. "What magazine? I'll buy a copy for ya!"

"No need, sales numbers don't affect me..." Thomas hands over the garlic and ginger. "If you really want to show support, how about a discount?"

"A discount? But my wholesale price from the farmers..."

"Solana told me you sold her Chinese cabbage for fifteen bucks this morning."

"Ah—fine, fine! Here you go, Mr. Artist! Fussing over a few dollars... Just take them, they're on the house!"

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Thinking back to today's interview, while it wasn't meant to be impromptu, having Thomas as the interviewee was purely a work mishap.

"I'm terribly sorry. I mentioned it to Rafayel, but I've been so swamped lately that I didn't realize I hadn't synced his schedule. He's probably off getting inspiration in some remote mountain with no signal again..."

Thomas apologizes profusely. "Do you have a backup plan? If needed, I can help contact other artists we've worked with."

But the magazine came specifically for Rafayel. The staff huddled together in discussion for several minutes before finally reaching a solution.

"Interview me? Me?" Thomas points to himself

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in surprise.

"Art school admission season waits for no one, and we need to submit the draft immediately," the staff explains. "Please help us out, Mr. Thomas. We need something to fill the pages today..."

The interview itself turned out quite relaxed, and afterward, the staff invited him for seafood barbecue at Whitesand Bay—they had actually brought a gift box of mantis shrimp as a gesture of sincerity, but with Rafayel absent, they had "no choice" but to enjoy an extra meal together.

"You all go ahead," Thomas waves them off. "It's my birthday, so I'm heading home to celebrate with my wife."

"What? We had no idea you were married!"

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"Happy birthday, Thomas!"

"This is so sudden, and we don't have anything else to give you... but please take this!"

Thomas feels the weight of the seafood gift box in his hands and looks at it in surprise, swallowing back his polite refusal.

"Well then, thank you everyone. I'll graciously accept—my wife happens to love garlic shrimp."

"Aww... you're so sweet!"

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As Thomas opens his front door, he's struck by the thunderous sound of crying.

Solana is cradling their wailing daughter, her gentle cooing doing little to soothe the baby.

Thomas quickly sets down his things and rushes to the kitchen. With practiced

movements, he mixes the hot and cold water, levels off a scoop of formula powder, pours it into the bottle, and shakes it thoroughly.

After letting it settle, he tests the temperature against the back of his hand—40°C, perfect.

Making formula for their daughter has turned both Thomas and Solana into human thermometers these days.

The piercing wails finally subside with the warm bottle of formula.

Solana gently pokes their daughter's chubby cheeks. "You little glutton, you just had formula two hours ago."

"Don't listen to Mommy. You're not a glutton at all. Eat up, you'll grow big and strong—"

Just as they finally manage to get their

daughter to sleep, the phone breaks the silence, undoing half an hour of the couple's efforts in an instant.

While Solana hurries to comfort their crying daughter again, Thomas takes the call and walks to the balcony.

After handling some business matters, Thomas ties on an apron and heads to the kitchen. As he pours the seafood from the gift box into the sink, water splashes up, and Solana chuckles while grabbing some paper towels to wipe his face.

Just as he's about to start preparing the seafood, his phone buzzes in his pocket again. With both hands occupied, Solana takes out his phone and holds it to his ear. Thomas continues peeling shrimp while talking to the

person on the other end.

"Regarding transportation, I've confirmed with the logistics company. The timing works."

"The lighting design needs to be adjusted based on the exhibits' materials and color schemes to ensure proper presentation."

"We should use neutral tones for the background to avoid competing with the visual focus of the exhibits. As for the overall atmosphere..."

Thomas takes four phone calls in the time it takes to prepare dinner.

Finally, as the couple enjoys their homey dinner of dishes and soup at the coffee table with their TV, Thomas's phone is silent, as if it too wants him to properly enjoy his birthday.

While Solana goes to get the cake from the

fridge, he quickly switches the mystery show on TV to his favorite romantic drama, "Let's Watch the Meteor Shower."

Returning with the cake, Solana glances at the screen and sighs with familiar resignation.

"This show again? Are you sure you're really an art professional..."

"High art meets pop culture, pop culture meets high art!"

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In the flickering candlelight, Thomas closes his eyes and makes his birthday wishes.

—May Solana be safe and happy.

—May our daughter grow up healthy and strong.

—May our family stay together forever.

—Oh right, and Rafayel. Hope he gives me less

to worry about this year, and may he and his Miss Bodyguard be happy together for a long, long time.

The moment he blows out the candles, darkness falls, and his phone decides to vibrate at that exact moment.

Thomas reaches for his phone with resignation, but upon seeing the caller's name, he springs to his feet. In one fluid motion, he throws on the blue-gray coat draped over his chair and heads to the entryway to change his shoes.

"It's Rafayel. If he's calling at this hour, it must be important—he's probably back in Linkon. I need to go see him. We'll have the cake when I get back later..."

Answering the call, he hears Rafayel's

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unusually serious voice: "Thomas, come to Mo—quickly—I have something extremely important to discuss with you."

Thomas manages to take the call, change his shoes, and press the elevator button all in one seamless motion, taking no more than ten seconds.

"Actually, I had something pretty important today too. I mentioned it to you, but I failed to put it in your schedule. That's my bad... Though it's all been taken care of now."

Rafayel sounds confused. "...Huh? This needs to go in my schedule too?"

As the elevator dings open, the voice from the phone receiver merges with one in real space. "Happy birthday!"

Thomas looks up to find two familiar

faces—Rafayel and his Miss Bodyguard.
"Happy birthday, my friend." Seeing Thomas still stunned, Rafayel leans against the doorframe and lifts the gift box in his right hand. "Important business accomplished—this didn't need to go in my schedule, right?"
"That's not what I..." Thomas trails off with a helpless laugh, quickly accepting the gift box.
"Come up for a bit? Have some cake?"
"Better not. You might lock me in and start demanding manuscript updates."
The girl, still in her hunter's uniform, playfully shrugs and links arms with Rafayel. "Free time is precious—spend it with the ones who matter. We won't keep you any longer."
"Exactly. Stop thinking about work and watching my every move." Rafayel waves with

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a light "bye" and turns away, walking into the evening breeze with his Miss Bodyguard.

And so Thomas returns to his doorstep, gift box in hand.

Click—the key turns in the lock, and the corridor's motion sensor light flickers on.

Behind the door, Solana's face lights up with pleasant surprise—

"You're back already?"

"Nothing urgent with Rafayel, he just came to deliver this," he says, setting the gift box on the table with a pat. "Now then—let's go cut that cake."

03 | Microscope

WishICouldPaint: As an art school applicant and devoted fan of "Artist Life Insider," I heard this one would feature Rafayel. Saved it specially for the day before my entrance exam hoping for some inspiration from my idol... but why did we get his manager instead?

PotatoSectLeader: Rafayel wasn't there, but his presence is everywhere. Think about it. Really think about it.

momo: I actually believed the part about him wearing a fishbowl while painting...

rafayel_ridable_fish_dinner: It's thanks to having such a professional manager like Thomas that Rafayel can focus on creating art! Supporting Thomas!

User426835: So why exactly don't we need to worry about Rafayel starving anymore?

Details please!

NightReaderOfUselessBooks: Rafayel's truly strong for never complaining about the industry...

GarlicShrimpSupremacy: Thomas clearly shows his expertise as a manager. The insights he shared in the interview are really valuable for anyone planning to enter the art industry! Good luck to everyone with their entrance exams!

confidentwomenlivebest: When is Rafayel releasing new work?

JustALeek: Was hoping to read about a master artist's journey in this special exam issue...

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"The art exam special is generating quite a buzz online. Thank you, Mr. Thomas!"

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After hanging up, Thomas pauses his work and checks his phone, wondering if his insights had particularly resonated with art students and guided countless exam candidates...

On the trending page, several topics are marked with red "VIRAL" badges.

#ArtistLifeInsider ArtExamSpecial#

#Rafayel: True Masters Never Complain About The Industry#

#Rafayel Paints While Wearing A Fishbowl#

"This hardly has anything to do with me."

He scratches his head in confusion, opens a discussion thread, and scrolls through until he finally finds a few mentions of Thomas among the flood of Rafayel comments.

03 | Microscope

Well, at least some people have the insight to recognize his expertise as an artist's manager.

Thomas turns off his phone with satisfaction and returns to work.

Beside him, Solana suppresses a smile, quietly keeping her achievement to herself.

Garlic shrimp supremacy for sure!